



State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

May 1, 2006

Dear Colleagues:

At both the national and state level, essential planning is occurring for a potential pandemic flu. The Department of Public Instruction is working with a State of Wisconsin cross agency team and the federal government, through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Department of Education, on pandemic flu planning. Last month, Governor Doyle invited state and local public health and DPI representatives, and emergency management and response leaders to a summit to plan for a potential pandemic flu. Coordination meetings are occurring in counties across Wisconsin.

Schools are prepared for a wide array of emergencies and crises thanks to your leadership and the hard work of so many educators, government entities, and your communities. As with current school emergency preparedness plans, which you have so successfully developed, the focus for pandemic planning should be on prevention, preparedness, and response. Pandemic flu planning should be incorporated into your school emergency preparedness plans. In this process, please consider the unique challenges of a pandemic flu that may not be addressed in your current plan.

I have enclosed a planning checklist for schools developed by the CDC that may be helpful as you consider elements to be included in your own plan. The checklist is the first iteration of planning documents and information that I will make available to you as they are developed. A group of national organizations representing school administrators and school health services are developing a tool kit for schools that will expand on the more general headings of the enclosed checklist. It should be available some time this summer.

We are working closely with Wisconsin public health officials and emergency planners to develop trainings and other resource materials, and have developed a webpage with additional resources and links to state and federal resources <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/pandemicflu.html>. Information on state/federal planning and cooperation, including links to the State of Wisconsin pandemic plan, is available at www.pandemicflu.gov/. I encourage you to become informed, attend trainings, and take advantage of available information and resources.

Your local health department and emergency operations officials have primary responsibility and have been charged with involving essential members of the community in the development of a community-wide plan. They are essential partners for you in developing an effective plan for prevention, preparedness, response, and ongoing communication. If you have not been contacted, I encourage you to make that connection before you begin to plan.

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State and local public health agencies will monitor and respond to actual outbreaks of illness and determine if and when a school should close because of an outbreak. Local health officers have the authority to require school closure if they believe the action is necessary to control or eliminate the spread of an infectious disease.

It is difficult to predict when the next influenza pandemic will occur or how severe it will be. However, experts agree that an influenza pandemic is inevitable and planning is essential. A pandemic flu is a rare, but recurring event that is more dangerous than seasonal flu. The difference is that people have no immunity, there is no vaccine and the outbreak occurs on multiple continents at once. The disease spreads easily person-to-person, causes serious illness, and can sweep across the country and around the world in very short time.

Given what we know about influenza pandemics and the potentiality for an outbreak, we must be prepared. Thank you for your leadership in coordinating with local and county officials in preparing your plans. I offer you our on-going leadership, support, and guidance as we work together on this vital task. Please feel free to contact Linda Caldart-Olson, consultant for school health services, at (608) 266-8857 or linda.caldart-olson@dpi.state.wi.us with any questions, and continue to review information and resources on our website.

Thank you for your continued efforts to provide safe schools for our children, parents, educators, and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth Burmaster". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly legible.

Elizabeth Burmaster
State Superintendent

EB:lco

Enclosure